RED BATTLER 4

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Indonesia Where to now?

By O. Dziga

> "In the Global South, where there is no fat to cut, an offensive by the U.S. will have devastating consequences that will likely provoke massive social explosions. In many countries, all it takes is a spark for massive explosions to erupt. The question is: will these be directed against the imperialists or will workers turn the guns against each other? This all depends on the question of leadership."
>
> —Editorial, *Spartacist* No. 70, May 2025

The wave of large and militant protests by Indonesian youth which began late August is among the most significant in Indonesia since 1998. Sparked by anger at the announcement of new privileges for parliamentarians—and inflamed by a brutal police response that saw multiple deaths—the scale and virulence of these demonstrations reveal a deep accumulation of anger and political and economic grievance among broad layers of the Indonesian masses.

Though large-scale demonstrations quickly receded, the government has no ability to stem the tide of discontent which created them. As the crisis in the imperialist order deepens, the Indonesian national bourgeoisie and political elite find themselves under increasing pressure, with the cracks in the post-*reformasi* order widening. ***Where to now?*** This is the question which neither the national bourgeoisie, the liberals, nor the leaders of the workers movement have a real answer to.

The shallow bases of economic stability for the masses are eroding. Indonesia has the highest unemployment rate in Southeast Asia, while the price of food and basic services increases year after year. Workers face layoffs and deepening deindustrialisation as manufacturing continues to collapse. New jobs remain almost entirely informal and low-wage. Life for the peasantry continues to be defined by rural poverty and exploitation by big business. Similarly dim are prospects for the large layer of educated petty bourgeois. A brutal job market for university graduates creates slim opportunities for economic stability, driving a decline in "middle class" spending as more and more are pushed back into the lower ranks of the proletariat and informal precariat.

Inequality is therefore increasingly stark. While conditions worsen for the masses, a narrow layer of deeply politically connected national bourgeois have reaped the benefits of a decade of investment-driven development, especially within the capital-intensive commodities sector. Indonesia thus faces a situation of combined and uneven development, under which a relatively enriched national bourgeoisie continues to expand its global and regional weight, as life for the masses remains defined by ***underdevelopment*** and ***worsening*** precarity.

Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP

Jakarta, 25 August: protesters clash with police outside House of Representatives (DPR) building.

Nationalist economic policy and investment in visible public infrastructure projects have, for over a decade, been sufficient to sell Indonesian workers a dream of peaceful, gradualist development towards national prosperity. Yet the conditions for this project—a more stable period of imperialist hegemony under which it was possible to navigate between the US and China—are rapidly eroding. As US imperialism tightens the screws on the neocolonial world, Indonesia walks on increasingly shaky ground. Every new crack makes it clearer that the real beneficiaries of the preceding period were a narrow political and economic elite. In this context, it is clear how salary hikes for well-paid parliamentarians could light a tinderbox of anger at corruption and inequality.

As in all of the neocolonial world, there is little fat to cut for the Indonesian masses. Yet as Prabowo attempts to navigate the approaching storms, a deepening program of austerity is the order of the day. Central government budget cuts are resulting in massive local tax hikes (sometimes by tens or even hundreds of percent). Workers and the petty bourgeoisie are thus increasingly squeezed from both sides. Directly leading into nationwide protests, local regencies from Central Java to Sulawesi saw explosive demonstrations over this issue. In Pati, an announced 250 percent property tax hike resulted in popular protests in which thousands clashed with police and breached the local DPRD building.

Capitulation to US ransom conditions in tariff negotiations last July will only further tighten this squeeze. Prabowo continues to posture as a firm-fisted pragmatist at home, and a proponent of the "multipolar" order internationally. But the drama surrounding these negotiations and the explosive anger of Indonesian youth reveal a rapidly narrowing space for the political manoeuvres he needs to succeed. These are only portents of crises to come which will surely escalate mass discontent and shatter elite unity.

The pattern of protest

The wave of demonstrations which began on 25 August cannot be viewed as an out-of-nowhere explosion, but as the product of an already combustible situation which has, to varying degrees, broken out in a rolling series of local and national protests since 2019 especially. Recent protests were of heightened scale and militancy, and mobilised more than the usual crowd of university students. Notable was the broader participation of some of the most precarious layers of society, *ojol* (motorbike taxi) drivers and others, as well as school-age teenagers—many from poor and working-class backgrounds.

Yet rather than representing a fundamentally new development, these demonstrations fit into a pattern of ebb and escalation. For years there have been consistent mobilisations of layers of youth (and more inconsistently, layers of organised workers and peasants). But every serious demand has been lost so far. Inevitably, these demonstrations ebb away, winning no substantial gains, while the situation which sparked them continues to deteriorate.

While protesters sought a reversal of DPR salary increases, and an end to police brutality, the demands raised were generally amorphous and disparate. Some called for the dismissal of Prabowo and Gibran, but for most anger was not directed at the presidency in particular but at inequality and government corruption in the abstract. Broader demands at the height of protests were often opaque. Among the most angular and angry calls taken up was for the dissolution of the DPR. Yet there was no clear or unified conception of what this would mean, or who would carry it out.

Meanwhile, various liberal demands for specific or abstract reforms were raised by student movement leaders, social media influencers, and NGO activists. Frequently during protests, these figures were invited to present their demands to state officials in exchange for attempting to calm the youth outside. As protests began to shrink, the so-called "17+8 demands of the people" (for "transparency, reform, empathy") began circulating online and in the media. Put together and promoted by a coalition of NGO-liberal types and social media influencers, these were a hodgepodge of immediate demands for an end to state repression and abstract liberal appeals for broader democratic *reformasi*.

The hold of this segment of liberal civil society over the organised political expressions of social movements in Indonesia—its stepping in to articulate the "political demands" of the "*rakyat*"—is a central obstacle to advancing a revolutionary struggle. The problem for this segment of politics is that it has sufficient organisation and influence to divert disorganised explosions of political anger into a dead end, while at the same time being totally impotent to achieve even its own aims. Though always representing a narrow layer in the petty bourgeoisie, today it stands more isolated than ever in the general political landscape: the pillars of *reformasi* are crumbling, and the great

liberal hope Jokowi (initially backed to the hilt by liberal "civil society") amounted to more of the same dynastic politics. Most importantly, the global ideological hegemony of liberalism is a dead letter.

While the liberals can raise demands concerning workers and unions, they have no interest in a program of ***class struggle***. Instead they alternate between total despair at the state of the country and a dreamland of rescuing bourgeois democracy and reviving *reformasi* through a new surge of "grassroots" protest. What they can't see is that ***global*** conditions have changed since 1998. The partial victory of bourgeois-democratic reform was not simply the product of "spontaneous" mass protests; it was conditioned by the global hegemony of liberal US imperialism, which no longer had use for such a Cold War holdover as Suharto—and which ideologically favoured a "democratic" shell for neocolonial exploitation.

The liberals will not resolve today's political impasse. There will be no "completion" of an already eroded *reformasi*. The prospects facing Indonesia today are either a deepening spiral of bonapartism, an explosion of reaction in some form, or the seizing of the initiative by the working class. Advancing the democratic struggle in this context will depend on a class-struggle fight against imperialist domination.

For Marxists, the key task is to point a progressive path out of today's dead-end pattern of protest escalation and ebb, one that is able to link the anger and aspirations of Indonesian youth to the workers movement with a class-struggle, anti-imperialist program. This task demands a clear break with the politics of the liberal NGOs (deeply entwined with imperialism) and the collaborationist/careerist student political milieu, posing key questions of leadership and program.

While the militancy of Indonesian youth is heroic, to simply cheer "solidarity" with demonstrations, as much of the left does (especially internationally) is totally insufficient and anti-Marxist. Liberal celebration of the masses' "spontaneity" not only fails to address the underlying forces driving social explosions, but disarms any ability to locate and fight the ***obstacles*** to advancing a revolutionary struggle. Though many on the Indonesian left, and even among the liberals, recognise the cycle in which Indonesian social movements are trapped and the deficiencies of a lack of organisation, the solutions posed tend to be abstract, purely organisational, or both.

It is not just "solidarity" or "greater coordination" that Indonesian social movements desperately need, but revolutionary leadership: a ***program*** and path towards victory against imperialism. It must be made clear to the progressive layers of the masses that in the absence of such a leadership, social explosions can only remain a platform for conflict and contestation among different factions of elite and imperialist interest—contributing ultimately to a spiral of reaction.

Alamy

Indonesian president Prabowo greets Donald Trump at October summit in Egypt. Prabowo advocates multipolar order but has little wiggle room as US squeeze tightens.

Provocation and elite conflict

Narratives of the manipulation of protests by elite actors have been widespread in the aftermath of demonstrations. The figure of the *penyusup* provocateur and *dalang* puppet-master behind political events are recurrent archetypes, and the argument today comes from all corners. Prabowo declares that protests were "paid for" and "manipulated" by "corrupters," foreign powers and "mafia" figures. Many liberal activists and academics argue that violence was deliberately incited by police or military provocateurs, either to delegitimise "peaceful dissent" or as part of inter-elite conflicts. A minority of leftists view the protests (entirely or partially) as a US-backed "colour revolution," in which NED liberals and elements of the state bureaucracy incited demonstrators in an effort to undermine Indonesia's BRICS posture.

Part of the strength of these narratives are the sometimes important kernels of truth. Provocateurs certainly were in the crowds, police agents are extensively deployed, and intelligence services keep close tabs on activists. There is a long history of riot incitement by military and police (most strikingly in 1998) and a number of acts of violence do appear to have been organised. Factional conflict within the elite is deep and extends into the state bureaucracies, including between the police and the military. And liberal NGOs ***are*** funded by the imperialists and ideologically subservient to them.

Disentangling the webs of influence beneath the surface, parsing through which acts were or weren't committed by state-linked provocateurs (or simply by anarchist groups and angry high schoolers) is a fool's errand. Yet it would be naive to deny outright that inter-elite, reactionary, and imperialist-linked actors played any role, especially given the amorphous and malleable nature of the protests.

However, to write off the demonstrations as purely reactionary or compromised would be equally naive. Over-fixation on questions of elite and imperialist manipulation risks political disorientation for Marxists. The situation in the country is dire and increasingly intolerable, the whole of the neocolonial world is feeling the squeeze of the imperialist vice. It does not take conspiracy for explosions of violence to occur in such a situation; when they did, it is striking how clearly directed at symbols of state power they were. Police stations and parliamentary buildings were the overwhelming targets of protest, with no pogromist or communal-type violence (anti-Chinese, etc.) occurring as it did widely in 1998.

Protests began to recede following announcements by Prabowo both that some DPR privileges would be revoked and that police and military had been ordered to crack down on "terrorism" and "anarchism." He and other ministers also made vaguely placating statements that the "17+8" demands would be "considered" seriously. Out of fear and acquiescence, protests were thus subdued, with scheduled demonstrations cancelled or rescheduled and attendance shrinking to the organised activist milieu. Lacking a revolutionary leadership capable of seizing political energy, demonstrations could indeed serve only as new terrain for elite manoeuvre—sometimes benefiting certain factions. Prabowo took the opportunity to reshuffle his cabinet, replacing a number of long-standing ministers (some targeted by protesters) with more personally loyal appointees.

The workers movement

The mainstream trade unions played a delicate game during the demonstrations. On 28 August, scheduled strike rallies took place, called by the pro-government "yellow" trade unions around Said Iqbal's Partai Buruh (Labour Party). Union leaders reiterated that these protests were unrelated to demonstrations that had begun days earlier, and focused only on their sectoral demands for a minimum wage increase, the abolition of jobs outsourcing, and the creation of a government task force to prevent layoffs. Several thousand organised workers attended, most in Jakarta, joined in some places by groups of *ojol* drivers.

The rally in Jakarta ran short, which Iqbal justified by declaring "there were no House lawmakers who wanted to talk with a labour representative" and that many workers "had to return for the afternoon shifts." In reality, Iqbal—a pro-government bureaucrat who last May Day spoke alongside Prabowo at a mass rally—was keen to minimise any crossover of the union base with the protests kicking off again later that afternoon. Organised contingents of workers were therefore disbanded by the early afternoon of the 28th, though many workers surely did remain at and attend demonstrations.

Protests that evening marked a turning point in the escalation of demonstrations, following the police killing of *ojol* driver Affan Kurniawan. Union bureaucrats urged "calm" and "unity" from members, asking them not to engage in illegal or "anarchist" actions. At the same time, they urged the government to take swift action to meet the demands of protesters and "demonstrate its commitment to listening to the aspirations of the people." Ultimately, mainstream union bureaucrats demobilised their base, while attempting both to appeal to protesters and present themselves to the state as loyal partners able to stabilise and temper working-class anger.

The small minority of "red" unions attempted to intervene with a more militant affect. These are "activist" and broadly anti-government unions, usually led by former student activists and in some cases current supporters of socialist groups. These unions were rhetorically in support of protests and generally called out members to demonstrations. But contingents were usually small, with left unions far from able to initiate large-scale political strikes.

The Labour Movement with the People (GEBRAK) coalition organised a reasonably-sized demonstration in Jakarta on 4 September, when protests had already shrunk significantly. While not tiny, this protest represented a small fraction of the workers movement. Though more militant in affect and raising its own slightly more left-sounding demands, the protest in some ways was not particularly distinguishable from those of liberal and NGO activists.

In fact, "red" unions tend to be deeply entangled with the liberal NGO sector. GEBRAK's founding statement is co-signed by union federations, socialist groups (from the post-PRD milieu, Perserikatan Socialis and Pembebasan), and just as many NGOs (including Greenpeace and the Jakarta Legal Aid Foundation). Many small "left" unions themselves operate more as legal-advice NGOs than militant trade unions. These politics mean that ***pink*** trade unions tend to offer not an ***alternative*** to the liberal dead end but rather a "left" and "working-class" face for it.

It is certainly possible that, in future periods of political struggle, the union bureaucracies will act more to mobilise their (often restive) bases. Large-scale strikes by even the yellow union bureaucracy took place during the 2020 protests against the anti-worker Omnibus Law, for instance. But these political strikes always

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end up symbolic actions, usually lasting one or two days and far from aiming to shut down the economy.

The fact is, the Indonesian working class is not today undergoing a period of political upsurge which gives it confidence to go on the offensive. Declining conditions and a weakened and politically disorientated union movement can foster passivity as much as they drive discontent. For the workers movement to step up as an independent and decisive force, both sides of the split in the union movement must be politically exposed.

The pro-government leaders of Partai Buruh are committed to a doomed strategy of attempting to prise minimal reforms out of the bourgeois parties by proving themselves loyal and useful partners. Today, they seek a coalition with Prabowo—who despite a populist posture is firmly committed to driving down the conditions of Indonesian workers in an effort to attract foreign investment into the country's ailing industrial base. The "red" unions are rightly repulsed by this but, unable to put forward a revolutionary anti-imperialist strategy, seek instead a liberal "activist" alliance doomed to impotence. The whole basis of the organisational split is, in many ways, premised on ***avoiding*** the necessary political struggle against Iqbal and the rotten yellow bureaucrats.

The left

The small and splintered organised left in Indonesia reacted with enthusiasm to the surge of struggle. Though all intervened separately with their small forces, there are common threads in the approach of each group that hindered the left's ability to provide a real alternative to the liberals in the contest for leadership over mass political energy.

Perhimpunan Sosialis Revolusioner (PSR) and the Front Muda Revolusioner (FMR)—Indonesian section of the Revolutionary Communist International (RCI)—were thrilled at the opportunity to join in the revolutionary rhetoric of their comrades. Days after protests began they published an article titled "The revolution has begun" which recounts the radicalism of protests, declares the working class must take collective action, and calls for "action committees," a general strike, and a "revolutionary government of the working class and the poor." While abstractly correct and orthodox on many points, the RCI's intervention existed largely separate from the material balance of forces on the ground. As protests entered a period of retreat they published a flurry of articles: calling on students to go to the factories to "meet the workers" and "spread this revolution to the working class." Once the revolution (which days earlier they proclaimed "showed no signs of stopping") was demobilised, they correctly noted that the question of leadership was critical to using the lull in struggle to prepare for coming offensives. Yet while abstractly denouncing the "reform from above" perspective of the "17+8" liberals, the concrete steps they proposed were continued calls for (proto-soviet) action committees and to "build now with urgency" a revolutionary organisation (i.e., "join the RCI!").

Perserikatan Sosialis (PS) were less bombastic than the RCI, proposing their own slate of "Demands of workers and the people," most of which are reasonable agitational (even transitional) demands that at least attempt to connect with the actual grievances driving the masses. The practical dimension of PS's intervention was, like the RCI, to call for (proto-soviet) "resistance committees." While such organs are desperately needed, calling to form them without properly clarifying the political obstacles (and necessity of a political split) can only render the demand meaningless. In fact, PS's approach to democratic struggle leads them to describe the central task today as the "national consolidation of the movement, including even with the 17+8 Movement" (in fairness they add the caveat "we must not moderate our program or our demands"). PS has not seriously accounted for the political collapse of the PRD (from which they emerged), nor the popular-frontist orientation of that party towards Megawati's PDI-P in the service of the "democratic struggle" of the 1990s. Thus, while they can quite correctly attack the liberals and (yellow) union bureaucrats, they lack an orientation that can actually combat them politically—a basic precondition to building revolutionary committees.

Painfully absent from the interventions of the RCI and PS was any attempt to advance a concretely ***anti-imperialist*** program—the hinge point of the democratic question in the neocolonial world. A hard line always seems to exist between anti-imperialism abroad and the struggle at home. This emerges from a correct revulsion to capitulating to the (brutal and reactionary) national bourgeoisie. But Marxists must compete with this class for hegemony over anti-imperialist sentiment, not leave it to present itself as the "defender of the nation."

Much of the left fell short on other fronts too. Most could not seriously address the political impasse facing the labour movement. Intervention on this point was limited to denouncing the most openly reactionary, pro-government bureaucrats like Iqbal and calling for more militancy. And while the whole left can critique the liberals, they tend to do so largely in the realm of political abstraction, without demonstrating concretely the impotence of liberal strategy at this juncture.

Indonesian "National Democrats," aligned with the International League of Peoples' Struggle (ILPS), did raise slogans against the imperialists (among whom they erroneously include China). However,

Waterfront Unions: Remember the Black Armada!
For labour action to stop the Executions!
SPARTACIST
For international labour action to defend Indonesian class-war prisoners!
SPARTACIST
Stop Australian military aid to Indonesia!
SPARTACIST
Forge a Trotskyist party, Indonesian section of a reborn Fourth International!
SPARTACIST

Australasian Spartacist

Sydney, December 1986: Spartacist League emergency protest against threatened execution of imprisoned Indonesian communists, survivors of 1965 anti-Communist massacre that launched blood-soaked military rule of Suharto.

the real axis of their intervention, mainly through the student Front Mahasiswa Nasional (FMN), was the call to fight back against the "fascist Prabowo-Gibran regime." This is a seriously disorienting analysis. Though reactionary and increasingly bonapartist, the Prabowo presidency is simply not one based on an organisation of extra-legal paramilitary terror. More importantly, this perspective is the product of a Stalinist misinterpretation of the national question: reflecting a stageist and essentially class-collaborationist search for a progressive wing of the national bourgeoisie to help carry forward "national democracy" against the fascist-comprador wing (today supposedly represented by Prabowo-Gibran).

The reactionary unity and anti-communist hysteria of the Indonesian elite today tends to mask these politics, giving Indonesian "National Democrats" something of a left cover. But as crises escalate in the country and world situation, a shifting political landscape will deepen both the opportunist and adventurist pressures—on them as well as on the rest of the Indonesian left.

Dispersed, underground anarchist networks exist across Indonesian cities. Most have their base among lower-class youth and school-age students (in contrast to most Marxist groups, which exist largely on campus). The weakness and semi-illegality of the (especially Marxist) left is an important factor in the relative significance of anarchist groups. In recent years state scaremongering over anarchism has become increasingly acute. The aftermath of demonstrations saw *kelompok anarko* [anarchist networks] widely fingered as responsible for violence and targeted with serious state repression. Hundreds have been arrested for connection to anarchist networks or alleged "anarchic acts" at demonstrations. What has happened since is difficult to discern, with some level of media blackout nationally, but it is certain that many are still in jail or facing sentences.

"Black Scare" hysteria is a threat to the entire left and workers movement. The defence of anarchists, along with all those arrested at demonstrations, is critical. Liberation will not be won by small bands occasionally throwing molotovs, and radical anarchist-inclined youth must be won to a Marxist perspective. Doing so, however, will depend on advancing a revolutionary program and struggle concretely.

Where to now?

At this juncture, peddling empty revolutionary optimism is facile. The workers movement and the left in Indonesia remain programmatically and organisationally impotent, and though the coming period presents real opportunities, the objective situation is far from ***certain*** to benefit the left and the workers movement. The national bourgeoisie remains in possession of many reactionary tools. Though reactionary alternatives to the present political order are underdeveloped in different ways, socialists must be prepared for the threats and obstacles ahead.

Powerful state-connected *ormas* paramilitaries are always a latent threat to workers and social movements in Indonesia. Although recent protests did not see their mobilisation, *ormas* were put on notice and had the crisis become more acute *preman* (thugs) could certainly have been deployed as shock troops of "public order." Firmly reactionary, these groups rely on networks of patronage, which under conditions of deeper crisis could lead them to destabilise as much as shore up the stability of the bourgeois order.

Political Islam has been greatly empowered since the fall of Suharto and remains a wellspring of reaction. Islamist mobilisations of hundreds of thousands against former Jakarta governor Ahok in 2016 are proof enough of this. While massively successful in deepening cultural Islamisation, political Islam in Indonesia is also rife with contradictions. As a political force, Indonesian Islam is deeply internally divided and its major organisations and parties are firmly integrated into the status quo political system. Yet it has long served as a container for religio-cultural discontent with Western imperialism, an attraction which could grow in a period of political crisis and would undoubtedly be mobilised against any advancing left.

Prabowo's first year in power has been marked by an increase in bonapartist methods of government and rising military political power. Revisions to the Armed Forces Law early this year

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removed restrictions on active-duty military personnel holding civilian bureaucratic posts, sparking panic in some sectors of a return to *dwifungsi*. While it is important to avoid liberal hysteria on this question, increasingly bonapartist attempts to lean on the army to preserve political order are inevitable as world crisis escalates. At the same time, much of the elite have an interest in avoiding a real return to military rule, which could threaten the systems of patronage that sustain them. Additionally, the bureaucracies of the state's repressive arm are themselves politically unconsolidated: police and military are often in conflict, and the army has its own internal divisions. In short, Prabowo is not Suharto, at least for now.

The trajectory of Indonesian politics is uncertain. Conditions for the masses are worsening and the relative political stability of the last twenty years shows real signs of cracking apart. The elite unity which today holds is under increasing threat of collapse as the global situation decomposes, yet all alternatives are underdeveloped. This offers real opportunities for the left and the workers movement, but also even greater dangers. Imperialist pressures could easily turn this powder keg of a situation into an explosive spiral of reaction. In the current lull in political struggle it is more urgent than ever that the Indonesian left take seriously the tasks of programmatic and organisational rearmament.

Outlines for a program

The following five points are presented as a basis for political discussion, debate, and consolidation. This report makes no claim to have the answers to the myriad political questions facing socialists and the workers movement in Indonesia. Clarifying programmatic principles is, however, the only basis on which to rebuild a fighting vanguard.

1. For united defence against state repression. Recent demonstrations resulted in the most significant period of state repression in Indonesia since 1998, with every tool short of a formal declaration of martial law deployed. Thousands were arrested in this crackdown, hundreds detained for extended periods, and many remain imprisoned awaiting trial. This includes both those caught up in the anarchist "Black Scare" (or accused of "anarchic acts" at protests) as well as numerous others facing charges of "incitement," often simply for social media posts. Many face years in prison, including some prominent liberal activists and NGO figures. There is an urgent need for socialists to take the lead in mobilising a united campaign in defence of all those caught up in this wave of repression. This struggle must be directly linked with defence of Papuan activists, who have also faced a wave of arrests and escalated military violence in recent months.

Free West Papua Campaign/Facebook

West Papua, 28 October: Protesters march against Indonesian military occupation and killings.

2. Towards 100% merdeka: the anti-imperialist struggle is the democratic struggle. Inequality, corruption, the dire conditions of the Indonesian masses, the predatory and bonapartist nature of the Indonesian elite—all are ultimately the product of imperialist subjugation and neocolonial oppression. In the face of a rising bonapartism, advancing the democratic struggle demands a break with the politics of liberal *reformasi*. Tied to the imperialists and this ideological remnant of US hegemony, the left will never break the hold of the national bourgeoisie on the masses. Marxists must demonstrate to the masses that only our program offers real direction in the struggle against imperialism. Cancel the imperialist debts, expel the imperialist agencies, tear up the capitulatory deals, refuse military cooperation in the war drive against China, ***complete the tasks of national liberation and 100% merdeka.***

Despite nationalist posturing, the elite have a doomed strategy which cannot defend the country from the imperialist death grip. Prabowo is desperate to maintain the balance between US imperialism and "multipolarity." But when the hammer comes down he can only sell out in economic negotiations (and beg Trump for an audience with his son). Moves towards greater military coordination with US imperialism—including offers by the state shipbuilder to turn the archipelago into a repair and refuelling platform for the US war machine—promise only greater disaster. When the national bourgeoisie does move against the imperialists, in their own selfish way (as in the past decade of "resource nationalism"), Marxists must fight for the working class to push this ***forward***, far beyond their carefully prepared limits.

3. Against gradualist developmentalism. With the conditions of workers, peasants, and the petty bourgeoisie in decline, the masses continue to yearn for real solutions to the problems of national development. Today's economic woes reveal that in reality (in spite of decades of investment and nominal infrastructural development) the national bourgeoisie and their representatives have enriched themselves at the ***expense*** of genuine national development for the masses. This is the direct result of their inability to combat imperialist subjugation. Marxists must demonstrate why the national bourgeoisie cannot fight imperialism or truly develop the country, and why these tasks are one and the same. Development under the imperialist boot will never be sufficient. Only a revolutionary alliance of the working class of Southeast Asia with workers of the imperialist centres and the Chinese workers state offers true allies in the struggle for national development.

4. Defend national minorities! For the right to self-determination! Papua merdeka! As crises worsen, it is more urgent than ever that the defence of national minorities and the right to self-determination is made central to socialist agitation. History shows that every period of political and economic crisis in Indonesia leads directly to an explosion of the national question. The 1990s saw communal violence across the country (in the major cities most brutally against the ethnically Chinese) and acute struggles for self-determination in Timor, Aceh, and Papua. There have not been major instances of communal violence in recent years, but the danger remains latent. Likewise, the national question is subdued in most of the archipelago by post-*reformasi* "decentralisation," but its re-ignition is not out of the question under a potential splintering of elite unity. In Papua, brutal repression of the national movement continues to escalate in scale and violence. As the bodies of fighters and civilians pile up, and jails are filled with political prisoners, the West Papuan national-liberation movement finds itself at an impasse to which it has no solution.

Only a revolutionary alliance of oppressed nationalities and ethnicities with the Indonesian working class offers a real path to emancipation. Yet for most workers, approaching these taboo issues tends to provoke deep hostility—seen as nothing short of an attack on the nation and its sovereignty. The workers movement will not be won to the fight for West Papuan liberation through appeals to liberal concern over human rights. Neither are abstract appeals to class solidarity alone sufficient to build unity across national and communal boundaries. What must be demonstrated in struggle (and patient explanation) is the common interest of the peoples of the archipelago in the struggle against imperialist subjugation. This is the only basis on which the special interest of the Indonesian working class in the liberation of oppressed minorities can be concretely revealed.

5. The workers movement must lead the way. The conciliatory and liberal-idealist politics of the presently dominant "leaders" of Indonesian social movements are a dead end. For the struggle to advance the workers movement must become its leading force, carrying behind it the rural peasant masses and radical layers of the petty bourgeoisie. But the present leadership of the workers movement, "yellow" and "red" alike, are not up to this task—committed to a strategy of pro-government class collaboration or seeped in petty-bourgeois liberalism. Building a revolutionary leadership of the class will require engaging with the workers movement to advance a genuinely anti-imperialist program counterposed to the existing misleadership. Only behind a revolutionary workers movement can the masses' anger be directed in a productive direction, and only with the militant youth behind it can the workers movement advance itself.

Engaging with and fighting to consolidate the splintered Indonesian left behind united-front actions and, ultimately, a revolutionary program is the first practical step towards advancing this struggle. ■